Clingendael
Netherlands Institute of International Relations

Policy Brief

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AUGUST 2014

Article 5 revisited – Is NATO up to it?

The events in Ukraine pose fundamental questions about the Alliance's military and political ability to uphold its obligations to defend NATO's member states. Russian tactics in Georgia and Ukraine remain below the article 5 threshold of an 'armed attack against one or more' Allies, which means that not only a dusting off of conventional defence forces is required, but also a rethink as to whether NATO has the right tools and mind-set. At the summit in Newport the Allies will have to rise to the challenge of translating the short-term response into a longer-term strategy, while simultaneously not neglecting ongoing needs for crisis management out-of-area.

Introduction

Thank you very much, Vladimir Putin, for helping NATO to find its raison d'être once again. Russia's land-grab of the Crimean peninsula, its ambiguous warfare tactics in Eastern Ukraine and Russia's possible involvement in downing flight MH17 have stirred NATO into action. The biennial NATO summit in Newport, Wales, this September could not have been timed any better. The 2012 Chicago summit's strategic concept, while formally balancing the three main tasks of collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security, had a clear focus on Afghanistan and developing partnerships. Thanks to the Eastern European Allies the article 5 tasks were, albeit almost routinely, underlined as vital. The Russian posture towards Ukraine has meant a wake-up call for NATO. Article 5 is suddenly back in the centre of everybody's attention. However, is NATO up to it? NATO's military readiness as well as political unity are questioned. This Policy Brief will address both the political and military implications of the Ukraine crisis and other rising threats for the upcoming NATO summit.

Are the Allies Aligned?

NATO's response to the Ukraine crisis has been a peculiar mix of tactical window-dressing and political self-help therapy. 'Window-dressing' because the outward resolve and harsh words of NATO's Secretary General Rasmussen vis-à-vis Russia barely concealed the diverging economic interests and political views of the Allies, and 'self-help therapy' because much was expected of the cathartic effect the Ukraine crisis could have for a revitalised NATO based on a new geostrategic paradigm. Rasmussen has labelled the Ukraine crisis as "the most serious crisis in Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall",[1] and

1 Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'A Strong NATO in a Changed World', *Brussels Forum*, 21 March 2014.

The Celtic Manor Resort, Newport, Wales, the venue of the NATO summit
Photo credit: The Celtic Manor Resort

"Russia's annexation of Crimea a 'wake-up call' for the Euro-Atlantic community, for NATO, and for all those committed to a Europe whole, free and at peace."[2] Numerous measures were taken to show NATO's resolve, which included the strengthening of political and military cooperation with the new Kiev government (including military training) and the suspension of all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council.

Geopolitics vs. cooperative security

Clearly, the geographical proximity and historical relationship (and subsequent lingering memories) of the former Communist allies have informed NATO's attitude towards Russia. Poland has been particularly adamant in confronting Russia, based on the understanding that "[w]e need to show that central Europe's NATO membership

2 *Address by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen*, "The Future of the Alliance: Revitalizing NATO For a Changing World", *Brookings*, 19 March 2014.

is not only political, but also military."[3] Although the US, the United Kingdom as well as France seem to share this hardline approach towards Russia, Germany cautions against unnecessary provocations of Russia caused by the "militarization" of the West's response.[4] Illustrative of this is the still influential former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt's argument that "I don't like to conjure up the idea of a Third World War, especially not if this is done to get more money to re-arm NATO. But the danger that things will escalate as it did in August 1914, increases day by day."[5] However, the German position towards Russia hardened considerably after the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 in July and Chancellor Angela Merkel has supported EU sanctions against Russia's banking, military and oil sectors. Berlin's reluctance towards a tougher NATO policy strengthens the Central European trauma that their fate may (again) be decided by a bilateral deal between Berlin and Moscow – a scenario that may sound outlandish to Westerns analysts, but still resonates in the collective memories of Mitteleuropa.

The debate about NATO's response towards Russia in the Ukraine crisis has therefore become politicized, opening rifts between the proponents of Realpolitik who celebrate the return of geopolitics, and the advocates of continued co-operative security based on dialogue.[6] The re-invigorated "hawks" are now found across the political spectrum (from the right as well as from the left), and clearly have the political momentum. Like a great work of art, the Ukraine crisis offers something for everyone. For example, it seems to prove that European security is still 'not finished', and that – hence – the US still needs to be fully engaged, including a credible (and working) nuclear security guarantee.

It also suggests that EU-NATO cooperation should be invigorated, since European security is not only a matter of military predominance, but also includes economic and trade issues. The simple reality that the EU has taken the lead in imposing economic and financial sanctions on Russia, as well as new plans for Europe's energy security, will be a boost for EU-NATO cooperation. It also opens the debate on the eastern fringes of both the EU and NATO. NATO's 2008 Bucharest declaration claimed that "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO." The proponents of further NATO enlargement (e.g., Poland and the Baltic states) use the Ukraine crisis to further their strategic agenda, although it is unlikely that consensus on this will be reached at the Summit in Wales.

The 2 per cent debate

Russia's annexation of Crimea and its antics vis-à-vis Ukraine strengthen the case for a marked increase in defence spending, particularly by the European members of NATO. US Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel argued that the simple fact that the US spends more than three times that of the other 27 NATO Allies "threatens NATO's integrity, cohesion and capability – ultimately, both European and transatlantic security."[7] In 2013, only four NATO Allies met the norm of 2 per cent of GDP on defence spending (Estonia, Greece, the UK and the US; France and Turkey came close). Hagel has now called for a special meeting of NATO members' finance ministers (or budget officials) to address this challenge, which will put additional pressure on the already dire financial situation of the European Allies. The

3 Paul Wells, "The Interview: Radoslaw Sikorski Speaks With Paul Wells", *Maclean's*, 1 May 2014. In that interview, Sikorski argues that "[w]e remember our own history. Russia has used the pretext of coming to the rescue of her compatriots many times before, in the partitions of Poland in the 18th century, and then under the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939."

4 "Ukraine Crisis Exposes Gaps Between Berlin and NATO", *Spiegelonline*, 7 April 2014.

5 "Helmut Schmidt Wirft EU Größenwahn Vor", *Spiegelonline*, 16 May 2014.

6 Walter Russell Mead, "Putin Knows History Hasn't Ended", *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 February 2014.

7 David Alexander, "Ukraine Crisis Highlights NATO Defense Spending Problem: Hagel", *Reuters*, 2 May 2014.

US call for more European defence spending has a long pedigree, with US Defense Secretary Robert Gates' claim (in June 2011) that Europe was facing "collective military irrelevance" as the most notable warning. In 2011, this warning could be disregarded as typical US sabre rattling. The Ukraine crisis puts this '2 per cent debate' in a totally different perspective and it is going to be an issue at the Summit in Wales, as was underlined by David Cameron in his letter to the NATO members' leaders[8]. If not now, when will Europeans ever face up to the fact that they will have to acknowledge the world as it is, and not how they hope it will be?

The problem, however, is that the timing of the debate on Europe's defence spending could hardly be worse. Although the rationale for more, but above all better, defence spending has been strengthened by the Ukraine crisis, it still requires political leadership to translate these objectives into a strategic vision and more resources and capabilities. It has to be kept in mind, however, that it is military effectiveness and output that really count and not a percentage of spending as such[9]. Investments (such as the 20% collective norm by NATO and the European Defence Agency) in the military shortfalls that have been identified by NATO and the EU are much more useful than, for instance, purchasing equipment that is already abundantly available. The NATO summit should also start to reconsider the current list of military shortfalls, as the strategic environment demands additional priorities.

NATO's Military Response

A renewed focus on territorial defence and conventional warfare does not make the instability in Europe's neighbourhood go away. On the contrary, the rise of militarily well-equipped and ruthless Islamic extremism in Syria and Iraq, the instability in Northern Africa, the Sahel, the Middle East and East-Asia, in addition to unfinished business in Afghanistan, pose enormous challenges for the transatlantic community. The Ukraine crisis has only added to an already full plate of potential threats and responsibilities for NATO Allies. Understandably, there is a call for a more 'multipurpose' NATO[10] that has sufficient operational flexibility, but for now the top security priority lies with a credible collective defence.

Preparing for a conventional attack

When tensions mounted in Crimea, NATO took various reassurance measures. It deployed AWACS surveillance aircraft over Poland and Romania and reinforced the air policing mission in the Baltic region. Member states have reinforced their naval presence from the Baltic to the Black Sea and deployed troops to participate in training and exercises, such as the 6,000 troops from across NATO that took part in exercise Steadfast Javelin in Estonia. It included infantry, fighter aircraft and also a cyber-security team. This exercise was planned long before the current crisis, but more of these can be expected. Washington launched a $ 1 billion 'European Reassurance Initiative' to increase exercises, training, and the rotational presence of the U.S. across Europe but "especially on the territory of the newer allies"[11]. This initiative, which needs Congressional approval, signals the U.S.'s commitment to European security and is still left unmatched by comparable European Allies' initiatives.

Readiness Action Plan

Twenty years of budget cuts and fifteen years of focusing on crisis management operations

8 David Cameron, *PM letter to NATO's member states leaders*, 2 August 2014, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-writes-to-nato-leaders-ahead-of-nato-summit-wales-2014

9 See also: Christian Mölling, *NATO's 2 percent illusion*, SWP Comments, August 2014.

10 Luis Simon, 'Back to basics' and 'out of area'. Towards a multi-purpose NATO', *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 159, no. 3, pp 14-19

11 Office of the Whitehouse, *Factsheet: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners*, 3 June 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/03/fact-sheet-european-reassurance-initiative-and-other-us-efforts-support-

have given rise to doubts about NATO's preparedness for conventional warfare.[12] In a recent House of Commons Report experts testified that NATO suffers from depleted command structures, a lack of large-scale exercises and training and shortcomings in rapid response.[13] Particularly the Baltic states would be 'easy prey'.[14] Most analysts consider the likelihood of a conventional attack by Russia on the Baltic countries as low. However, the ability of NATO to swiftly respond to a surprise attack against the Baltic countries is considered to be poor. A credible conventional deterrent implies that NATO's current shortcomings need to be resolved. In order for NATO to become 'fitter, faster and more flexible' in the long-term, the Allied ministers decided on 3 May to draft a 'Readiness Action Plan' (RAP) which is on the agenda of the Summit in Wales. This Plan is expected to consist of three key components:[15]

1. build on the reassurance measures already taken in Eastern Europe, in order to make them sustainable for the longer term;
2. the presence of NATO forces in Eastern Europe, upgraded intelligence gathering and sharing, updated defence plans and an expanded training schedule with more exercises, of more types, in more places, more often;
3. upgrade elements of the NATO Response Force (NRF), to make them able to deploy more quickly. Speed is of the essence to deter sudden threats along NATO's borders. In addition, NATO aims to pre-position equipment and supplies in Eastern Europe.

It is doubtful whether all member states (particularly Germany is opposed) will agree to a permanent stationing of NATO forces in the eastern parts of Alliance territory. More probable is a 'technically permanent' presence of NATO troops through training and exercises. There are also proposals for pre-positioning supplies and equipment at bases in the east in readiness for sending troops if needed and to enhance an existing NATO regional headquarters in north-western Poland.[16]

The NRF will be at the core of the RAP, also including earlier initiatives such as the Connected Forces Initiative and Smart Defence. With a joint headquarters and 13,000 'highly ready and technologically advanced' troops provided on a rotating basis by members, the NRF is seen as the 'tip of the spear' for the alliance's future deployments. This includes everything from acting as the first line of defence to providing disaster relief. The NRF aims to operate either on its own or as a force that buys time before reinforcements arrive. Particularly the Special Forces component of the NRF is planned to be improved. This is a continuation of the trend that enhancing Special Forces capabilities has already been a priority by NATO in the last few years. In 2012, for example, it created a Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ). The dissatisfaction with the current speed of deployability of the NRF, led to proposals being circulated for an 'immediate alliance assurance force'. This force would be maintained at a high state of readiness for rapid deployment before a conflict erupts anywhere on Alliance territory and along its periphery.[17]

Ambiguous warfare

Modern deterrence implies that it is necessary not only to counter threats to the territorial integrity of NATO members such as the Baltic States, but NATO also needs to find a convincing answer to the type of 'ambiguous' or 'irregular' warfare that the Russian Federation has shown on the Crimea peninsula and Ukraine. Invasion by stealth, creating militarily and legally ambiguous

12 Spiegel Online, 'Konflikt mit Moskau: NATO wäre beim Angriff nur bedingt abwehrbereit', 18-5-2014

13 House of Commons Defence Committee, *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two – NATO*, July 2014, pp. 21-25.

14 Matthias Gebauer, 'NATO Strategie gegen Russland: Zurück in den Kalten Krieg', *Der Spiegel Online*, 3 -6-2014.

15 Anders-Fog Rasmussen, 'A NATO for a Dangerous World', *Wall Street Journal*, 17 August 2014.

16 Reuters, *NATO nears agreement on beefing up presence in eastern Europe: Poland*, 13 August 2014.

17 Jorge Benitez, 'NATO Eyes 'Alliance Assurance Force'', Atlantic Council, 20 August 2014.

situations require NATO to rethink its military posture, political responses and a modernisation of its deterrence doctrines. The ability to wage information warfare, psychological operations and to cooperate with the European Union to exert influence through energy and trade policies are areas in need of NATO's immediate attention. The United Kingdom's House of Commons questioned in a recent report whether article 5 of the Washington Treaty is sufficient in the face of asymmetric attacks:

> *these tactics are designed to test the lower limit of the Alliance's response threshold, are likely to involve deniable actors, and work to exploit political division. They also bring in to question the operation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, NATO's cornerstone.*[18]

Because the political and military threshold for Article 5 is so high, the importance of the Washington Treaty's Article 4 is growing. It provides for a request for consultations by the member states in the event that the 'territorial integrity, political independence or security' is threatened. The article was invoked by Poland in March 2014, which was the fourth time in NATO's history. NATO would be well advised to create doctrines and responses to Article 4 calls in cases of asymmetric or ambiguous threats. Despite NATO's large military capability, it is possible that NATO is defeated by asymmetric tactics. Therefore, a varied toolbox of capabilities, including counter-propaganda, Special Forces Operations and ensuring the resilience of cyber systems, is necessary. However, NATO is a military organisation and has a relatively limited role to play in assisting countries to become politically and economically resilient to incursions of 'little green men'; a task which is more suitable for the European Union.

NATO's Framework Nations

In the field of capability development, 'smart defence' and 'pooling and sharing' have obtained the status of evergreens. The German proposal to develop a so-called 'Framework Nations Concept' is meant to offer a practical mechanism for realizing extensive cooperation amongst volunteering nations. It can provide a new approach for multinational cooperation in an adapted NATO Defence Planning Process, which takes into account international defence cooperation.[19] The key idea of this concept is that those nations who retain a broad spectrum of military capabilities would act as cluster coordinators. Smaller member states could be invited to plug into those enabling capabilities which only the big nations can provide.

The German proposal looks feasible, particularly when flexibility in cluster-membership is taken into account. The Framework Nations Concept could add a leadership component to the already existing defence cooperation initiatives, attributing a special responsibility to larger member states for providing a military backbone to cooperating groups. Besides efficiency advantages, it could also be conducive to seek cooperative solutions.[20] To what extent the orientation of tasks among the various Framework Nations' groups can be differentiated is a matter for debate. It is clear that, for instance, the French and British-led cluster is predominantly but not exclusively geared towards 'initial entry', while a German-led cluster is more likely to focus to a large extent on stabilisation and collective defence tasks. The German Framework Nations initiative will be discussed at the summit in Newport and is likely to be accepted in some form.

Missile Defence

NATO agreed at the Lisbon Summit in 2010 to extend its own ballistic missile defence (BMD) capability beyond the protection of forces to include all European populations and territory. In May 2012, at the Chicago

18 House of Commons Defence Committee, *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two – NATO*, Third Report of Session 2014-15, July 2014, p. 34.

19 Alexander Mattelaer, 'Framework nations: a German answer to a European problem?', http://www.europeangeostrategy.org, 2 March 2014.

20 Christian Mölling, *NATO's Two Percent Illusion*, SWP Comments, August 2014.

Summit, NATO Members took a first step towards operational status by declaring an interim capability readiness for NATO's missile defence system.

As a result of the Crimea crisis NATO no longer sees the need to strike a deal with Russia over BMD. After years of debate there is now a consensus among NATO governments and experts that missile defence will invariably be a component of the Alliance's new force mix, along with a modest nuclear weapons arsenal, robust conventional forces, and other capabilities.

But the main challenge facing NATO's BMD programme comes from the perception in the U.S. Congress that European partners are not bearing their share of the burden. To accommodate the U.S., an option for the European member states might be to collectively purchase BMD interceptors, sensors and other capabilities to complement the systems already provided by the U.S.[21]

Conclusion – Is NATO up to it?

The credibility of the collective defence clause of the Washington Treaty is in doubt. This touches the core of the Atlantic Alliance and therefore needs urgent attention. The term 'historic summit' tends to suffer from inflation, but the one in Newport seems to deserve such a label. NATO would be well advised to understand and seek ways to utilize the ambiguous type of warfare that cost Ukraine the Crimean peninsula (and, as some claim, that also cost Georgia Abchazia and South-Ossetia). Are NATO and its member states up to it? Perhaps it is possible to answer this question by posing another one: if not now, when?

Recommendations

- Political resolve and **unity** among the Allies – in cooperation with the EU – is the best deterrence against Russian scheming. The September-Summit is an excellent opportunity to display this unity and to back it up with concrete measures;
- NATO should provide concrete substance to the **Readiness Action Plan** at the Summit in Wales, including the pre-positioning of supplies and equipment, large-scale exercises and the presence of NATO-troops in Eastern Europe, short of permanent stationing;
- NATO should ensure that a credible conventional military deterrent, with the **NATO Response Force** at its core, is part of its toolbox;
- NATO should develop, as a matter of urgency, doctrines and capabilities to counter **ambiguous warfare tactics** and develop a framework as to how to cooperate on this with the EU;
- **Ballistic Missile Defence** is part of NATO's deterrence capabilities: to contribute to burden-sharing, European member states should contemplate collectively purchasing BMD interceptors, sensors and other capabilities to complement the systems already provided by the U.S.;
- Increases in European **defence budgets** would send a reassuring signal, but it is ultimately about what countries are able and willing to do with the additional funds that matters (output). More helpful benchmarks are, for example, a norm of at least 20% investment spending by individual countries based on output criteria related to EU/NATO priority shortfalls;
- The Summit in Wales should reflect that the Allies are aware of the highly volatile and complex strategic environment, requiring a 'multi-purpose' NATO. The Summit is well advised to decide on a roadmap towards a report on the **longer-term strategic implications** of the Ukraine crisis and the deterioration of the security situation in other parts of the world.

21 Richard Weitz, *NATO on Edge*, ISN - ETH Zurich, 24 April 2014.

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